

# Life!

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 2026 SECTION B

« BLACK BRILLIANCE »

## Carter Woodson: The father of Black history

BRITANNICA

Carter G. Woodson (1875-1950) was an American historian who first opened the long-neglected field of Black studies to scholars and popularized the field in schools and colleges across the United States.

He established, in 1926, what became Black History Month, and he came to be known as the "father of Black history."

Woodson, whose parents were formerly enslaved people, was born into a poor family that moved to West Virginia, where he supported himself and his family by working in the coal mines. He did not have enough money to enroll in high school until he was 20. After graduating in less than two years, he taught high school and wrote. He studied at Berea College in Kentucky, where he received a bachelor's degree in 1903, and then at the University of Chicago, where he received a second bachelor's and a master's degree in 1908.

He earned a Ph.D. from Harvard University in 1912—the second African American, after W.E.B. Du Bois, to do so.

In 1915 Woodson and four others founded the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (today called the Association for the Study of African American Life and History), which encouraged scholars to engage in the intensive study of the Black past. This area of study had previously been largely neglected or distorted in the hands of historians who accepted and perpetuated a biased picture of Black people's role in and influence on American and world affairs.

In 1916 Woodson edited the first issue of the association's principal scholarly publication, *The Journal of Negro History*, which, under his direction, remained an important historical periodical for more than 30 years; it was renamed *The Journal of*

Please see CARTER | 2B

## Vacation in Miami: There's something for everyone

By Dwight Brown

BLACK PRESS USA

Travel to Miami and you'll find great places to eat, stay and play—no matter your tastes or age.

The destination has something for everyone along with 80-degree winter weather. So, if shoveling four feet of snow and freezing North Pole-like temperatures are vexing you or you just need some time away, grab your suitcase and go.

**Restaurants for the mature, moneyed and sophisticated**

**Delilah**

Walk into this downtown waterfront restaurant, which faces Biscayne Bay, and you'll catch its swanky vibe.

Views of the Miami skyline from the patio are astounding. While the interior's low lighting, a white grand piano and red leather booths have a plush 1920s style supperclub look. The fine American cuisine often attracts celebrity clientele. If you join the stylish crowd, you'll be in for an exquisite dining experience.

**Suggestions:** 1. Seafood Tower appetizer (shrimp, oysters, lobster, Hiramasa ceviche, crab salad, tuna). 2. Main course Roasted Rack of Lamb. 3. Kendall's Slutty Brownie.

**Donatella Boutique Hotel & Restaurant**

This a romantic dining experience you'll want to share with someone. Credit the serene oasis feel in the heart of busy South Beach. Limestone columns and a brick courtyard that evoke the Baroque era. Waiters from places like Rome and Venice that help to create the restaurant's Mediterranean atmosphere.

The food tastes fresh and is so perfectly Italian

Please see VACATION | 2B

## Teen never got day in vaccine court. Former lawyer advises RFK on overhaul.

By Maia Rosenfeld

KFF HEALTH NEWS

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. — In 2019, after a routine vaccination, 11-year-old Keiethron Thomas felt a sharp pain in his shoulder and down his arm.

His mother, Melanie Bostic, thought it would go away after a few days. But days turned to weeks, then months, and years.

Bostic learned of a federal program designed to help people who suffer rare vaccine reactions.

The Vaccine Injury Compensation Program was created in 1986 after a flood of vaccine injury lawsuits drove drugmakers from the market. Congress aimed to offer a faster and more generous path to compensation for people injured by vaccines, while

shielding manufacturers from liability. The VICP, commonly known as vaccine court, is taxpayer funded. The government pays any award to claimants as well as attorneys' fees.

Bostic filed a claim in 2022 for compensation to cover her son's spiraling medical bills. She then contacted the Carlson Law Firm, which referred her to Arizona-based attorney Andrew Downing — who now serves as a senior adviser to Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr.

Downing declined to comment and HHS did not respond to requests for comment for this article.

Downing, who has represented hundreds of plaintiffs in vaccine court in

Washington, D.C., signed on to take their case, according to a contract reviewed by KFF Health News. They agreed Downing would pursue the claim before the VICP.

Bostic shared documents and medical records as he requested them. Months passed as she waited for news on her son's case.

After several months of making court filings, Downing told her it was time to opt out of the vaccine program and sue the drugmaker. When she refused to opt out, he withdrew from the case.

The government paid Downing \$445 an hour for representing Bostic, typical for program attorneys with his experience, according to court records.

Three years later, Bostic

see if you deem not only the content but also the social interaction acceptable.

### Use facial age estimation

Online platforms are increasingly looking for ways to keep users safe, and that includes added levels of verification. As part of a multilayered approach to safety, Roblox is the first online gaming platform to require age checks for users of all ages to access chat features, enabling age-

appropriate communication and limiting conversations between adults and minors. These secure age checks are designed to be fast, easy and secure using Facial Age Estimation technology directly within the app.

"Our commitment to safety is rooted in delivering the highest level of protection for our users," said Matt Kaufman, chief safety

Please see SMART | 2B



Melanie Bostic's son Keiethron Thomas has chronic arm and shoulder pain after a rare, suspected injury from the HPV vaccine.

rather than help them work through the program, Thomas, now 18, endures away.

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### « RIDES



The 2026 Toyota Corolla Cross has a tweaked design and an emphasis on comfort and economy.

TOYOTA

## Tweaked Corolla Cross built with comfort in mind

*Toyota's sport utility vehicle is smaller, less expensive than RAV4*

By Winfred Cross

FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

The Toyota Corolla is recognized as a dependable sedan that is frugal on fuel and will last for hundreds of thousands of miles.

Recently, Toyota has expanded the brand a bit to include a hot hatchback and entry-level SUV. The Corolla Cross is that SUV. It is assembled in Alabama and the smallest SUV by the brand available in the U.S. It's smaller than the best-selling RAV4 and less expensive.

The Corolla Cross has been around since 2022. It receives a mild upgrade for 2026, which includes modest restyling of the

grille and headlamps and a few other exterior nips and tucks. The biggest tweaks are in the interior. My XLE model gets a 12.3-inch digital cluster and a 10.5-inch touch screen, each larger than last year's standard. The center console has also been revised to offer more storage space. My test car also had AWD. Included with that package is a heated steering wheel and front seats.

The Corolla Cross is powered by a 2.0-liter gasoline engine that makes 169 horsepower and 151 pounds-feet of torque. A continuously variable transmission sends power to all wheels.

Corolla Cross competes with the

likes of the Honda HR-V, Hyundai Kona and Mazda CX-30, all of which are bit more fun to drive. Toyota, however, has tuned the Corolla Cross more for comfort than sportiness. The Corolla sedan isn't sporty either, which is what the Cross is based on. I'm assuming Toyota feels that's the kind of ride people buying the Corolla Cross want. It's not a bad idea because the Cross is very comfortable on the road. The ride isn't cushy or spongey, just comfortable. There is not a lot of thump and bump making it into the cabin. The truck was certainly civil on around town errands and was

Please see COROLLA | 2B

## Smart gaming: Keep kids safe online

FAMILY FEATURES

Playing video games can be a fun, social experience. However, online gaming also poses real risks, especially for kids. As a parent, you don't necessarily need to be a gamer yourself to help keep your children safe when the controller is in their hands.

Consider taking proactive steps like these to create a healthy online gaming environment for kids of all ages.

### Check system privacy settings

As a first line of defense — before your child even starts gaming — spend some time in the device or console privacy settings. Here you can turn off sharing, disable location tracking, limit microphone and camera access and restrict how other users can interact with your child's profile. Similarly, many games and platforms include built-in privacy settings that can be tailored to your child's age and online experience. These settings may allow you to limit who can view your child's profile or send a friend



Adults can take proactive steps to keep children safe while gaming.

request, message or voice chat.

### Research games

Because not all games are created equal, look up game ratings through a service such as ESRB before buying or downloading to understand the maturity level of the game and determine if it's appropriate for your child. To take it a step further, read reviews from other parents or watch gameplay videos to

see if you deem not only the content but also the social interaction acceptable.

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appropriate communication and limiting conversations between adults and minors. These secure age checks are designed to be fast, easy and secure using Facial Age Estimation technology directly within the app.

"Our commitment to safety is rooted in delivering the highest level of protection for our users," said Matt Kaufman, chief safety

Please see SMART | 2B

## Corolla Cross built with comfort in mind

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suitable for highway driving.

The Cross' passing power is OK, but you will have to lead-foot it. The engine will protest a bit will get the job done. The vehicle's driving dynamics aren't anything to write home about but, again, the vehicle is capable. Cornering is about what you would expect for something with a soft suspension. The AWD does make the vehicle good in the rain.

The most glaring issue is the noise level up to highway speed. It's very noticeable but not overbearing. You can turn up the JBL audio system to compensate.

The XLE version of the Corolla Cross is the top model and the only options available are a sunroof, JBL audio system and a power lift gate. My car had the sound system.

The Cross is more practical than anything. It has ample storage room in the rear with a wide opening to shove large items in. The rear seats fold but not flat, so carrying larger items may be a problem. Carrying larger people could be a problem as well. The vehicle has limited leg room if you have tall front passengers. Rear occupants are treated to rear vents for climate control access.

Front passengers have the better

seats. The XLE model gets vinyl seats, but they are comfortable. Again, tall passengers may have problems because of the length of the seat cushions. There may not be enough thigh support. There could also be a bit more padding. The steering wheel is leather wrapped, which is a nice touch. There is also ambient interior lighting. The driver's seat is power adjustable and there is dual-zone, automatic climate control.

The XLE also comes with lane keeping assist, blind spot detection, adaptive cruise control and lane departure warning. Roof rails, upgraded headlamps, parking sensors, rear automatic breaking, wireless charging pad and 18-inch alloy wheels are also standard.

The Corolla Cross XLE starts at \$31,310.

Pros:

- Entry-level price
- Abundant standard equipment
- Abundant cargo space
- Comfortable, smooth ride
- Toyota longevity
- Revamped center console
- Larger displays

Cons:

- Tight rear seat
- Needs more power

## Carter G. Woodson: The father of Black history scholarship

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African American History in 2002. In 1937 he launched The Negro History Bulletin (renamed Black History Bulletin in 2002).

In 1919-20 Woodson was dean of the College of Liberal Arts and head of the graduate faculty at Howard University, in Washington, D.C., and he was dean at West Virginia State College from 1920 to 1922. He subsequently worked as an independent scholar based in Washington, D.C., and led the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History.

While in West Virginia, he also founded and became president of Associated Publishers, a publishing company that produced books on Black life and culture, subjects that were largely ignored by other publishers in the United States.

In 1924 Woodson mobilized his college fraternity, Omega Psi Phi, to introduce Negro History and Literature Week in order to recognize Black achievements. He built on that effort by using the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History to launch Negro History Week in February 1926.

Woodson chose February so that this event coincided with the birth dates of two men important to Black history: Frederick Douglass, who celebrated his birthday on February 14, and Abraham Lincoln, born February 12. Negro History Week expanded to Negro History Month in some places as early as the 1940s, and in 1976, more than two decades after Woodson's death, U.S. Pres. Gerald Ford called on Americans to recognize and celebrate Black History Month.

## Smart gaming: Keep kids safe

Continued from page 1B

officer at Roblox. "By building proactive, age-based barriers, we can empower users to create and connect in ways that are both safe and appropriate."

Once age-checked, users are assigned to one of six age groups: under 9, 9-12, 13-15, 16-17, 18-20 or 21 and older, ensuring conversations are safe and age appropriate.

Age checks are optional; however, features like chat will not be accessible unless an age check is completed. Chat is also turned off by default for children under age 9, unless a parent provides consent after an age check.

Keep personal information private

It's seldom a bad idea to be extra cautious when interacting with strangers online, even if they seem friendly enough while playing the game. Teach

children what information not to share, including their full name, address, birthday, school name, phone number, email address, passwords or any photos that may contain any personal information (like a house number or school logo) in the background. Also encourage a screen name and generic avatar for added privacy.

Turn on parental controls

Designed to allow parents a supervisory role in their child's online gaming experience, parental controls on many platforms include the ability to set schedules and limit playtime, restrict access to certain content or social features, require a password for purchases or set a spending limit.

Avoid clicking unfamiliar links

Player profiles and in-game chats may include links to external sites, including those promising

rewards or cheat codes. Because they can be used to gain access to personal information, remind your children to ask an adult before clicking any unfamiliar links while gaming so they can be verified as trustworthy.

Employ privacy and security tools

While system or console-specific settings allow parents to set content restrictions, approve downloads, manage friends lists and more, additional layers of security are sometimes necessary. Extra safeguards such as antivirus and internet security software, DNS (domain name system) filtering and two-factor authentication can also be enabled to help keep kids safe online.

For tools to make informed decisions and support children's gaming experience, visit [corp.roblox.com/safety](http://corp.roblox.com/safety).

## Cost of medical education is changing who can afford to become a doctor

By Fran Smith

CENTER FOR HEALTH JOURNALISM

Yosef Berlyand had \$263,000 in medical school debt when he graduated in 2019.

He has scrupulously made loan payments since then. With accumulated interest, he now owes \$271,000.

The stress of bearing so much debt weighs heavily on Berlyand, an assistant professor of emergency medicine at Brown University and an attending emergency physician at Rhode Island Hospital in Providence. But that's not why he and a college friend who's also now a debt-saddled physician published an essay in JAMA this month, calling for reforms in the cost and financing of medical education.

"Physician incomes are certainly, by all societal standards, very high," he told me. "I can't possibly complain. What worries me is that the cost of becoming a physician is starting to turn people away from the profession altogether."

Ballooning education costs are not the only challenge, write Berlyand and Vihang Nakhate, a neuro-oncologist at the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute in Boston. Young people considering a career in medicine face ever-changing federal student loan

rules and years of training after medical school. Meanwhile, physician incomes are largely stagnant and the cost of living keeps going up. "The medical profession risks losing a generation of promising talent," Berlyand and Nakhate write.

There's growing evidence that medicine especially risks losing talent from poor and working-class families, and Black and Latino communities. That loss will hit the most vulnerable patients hardest.

The average price tag for four years of medical school plus the prerequisite college degree was about \$371,000 last year, more than double the cost 20 years ago. At some private schools, the cost can approach a half million dollars. Simply applying to medical school can run up thousands of dollars in bills for all-important test preparation courses and exam fees, application fees and travel for interviews.

About 71% of medical school graduates in 2024 carried educational debt. Half of the borrowers owed more than \$200,000. The federal mega-spending bill passed last year caps federal borrowing for medical students at \$50,000 a year and \$200,000 total. That could force a majority of aspiring physicians to take out high-

Please see MEDICAL | 3B



DONATELLA BOUTIQUE HOTEL & RESTAURANT

Miami's Donatella Boutique Hotel & Restaurant offers a romantic dining experience.

## Vacation in Miami's got something for everyone

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you'd think a gondola might take you home.

Suggestions: 1. Black Truffle Cacio E Pepe pasta. 2. Lobster Spaghetti for main course. 3. End with Delizia al Limone (iconic Amalfi Coast dessert).

Las' Lap

The Caribbean menu was created by the renowned James Beard Award-winning Chef Kwame Onwuachi. Famed for his Lincoln Center NYC restaurant Tatiana. Onwuachi and the team behind Las' Lap in New York have brought their Afro-Caribbean flavors to South Beach.

Come for the island flare. Stay for the rum cocktails, lavish bar and to dine on innovative dishes from Escovitch Crab Claws to Brown Stew Chicken. Yum!

Suggestions: 1. Ume Spritz mocktail. 2. Cape Romano Oysters. 3. Entrée Oxtail Cuban (black truffle, mojo oxtail, wagyu beef bacon).

Uchi

James Beard Award winning Chef Tyson Cole specializes in curated tastings and seasonal omakase. They're just a few of the marque specialties at his upscale Japanese restaurant Uchi, in the vibrant Wynwood Arts District.

The friendliest staff in Miami makes and serves his tempting tasting menus: Omakase (ten-course menu), Somakase (curated menu) and Vegetarian (Six-course menu). Sumptuous Japanese cuisine that looks gorgeous too.

Suggestions: 1. Zero Proof mocktail Raba. 2. Nigiri sushi appetizer Sake Toro (Scottish salmon belly). 3. Karaage entre (fried marinated chicken, cucumber, seasonal pickles). 4. Seasonal Sorbet.

Ocean Drive eats for the young

Café Americano

Seek out Café Americano for the comfort food, invigorating music and people watching. Folks from around the world and around the corner gather at this outdoor/indoor diner set in Hotel Victor. Some venture up to the rooftop open-air lounge to gaze at the beach and stars.

Others stop by downstairs for breakfast, lunch, dinner or drinks. The crowd is as much fun as the food and retro funky playlists.

Suggestions: 1. Spice Brined Chicken Wings. 2. Dine on crispy Branzino for the main course. 3. End with the very fluffy Bread Pudding Waffle.

J'Adore Miami Beach

Party hard and join the festivities with the dancers, singers and magicians who perform on a counter around the bar. The eclectic awestruck guests assembled look like extras from a Quentin Tarantino movie. Scrumptious Cuban Soul cuisine fills the menu.

Cabaret shows include "House of Desire and Friends" (burlesque) and Havana Nights: Fiesta de Amigos (island flair). This nightclub space has history; it was once owned by Nick Cannon and Pitbull.

Suggestions: 1. Drink a Hotel Nacional (Bacardi 8 Rum). 2. Munch on Mojo Pork Crispy Rice. 3. Main course it with Fried Whole Snapper.

Oh! Mexico

At this dynamic Latino restaurant, fresh tortillas, five tangy salsas and delicious, handmade guacamole are the heart of its menu. The array of traditional and modern Mexican food includes spicy, savory dishes that embody indigenous New World ingredients and Spanish influences. The casual atmosphere is particularly lively on Taco Tuesday.

Suggestions: 1. Oh Mexico Margherita (Astral Blanco Tequila). 2. Crispy shrimp appetizer. 3. Fajitas with chicken, steak, shrimp and vegetables.

Hotel and resorts for the mature, monied and sophisticated

The Betsy

Want a home away from home? Check into this plush, super friendly 130-room boutique hotel. The sophisticated accommodations are housed in an elegant 1940s Georgian Revival building. Join the upscale, international crowd in the cozy lobby lounge and listen to soft jazz music. Art and photography line the walls. This is what AAA Four Diamond hotel service feels like.

Suggestions: 1. The Betsy Breakfast is scrumptious. 2. The 16 Oz New York Strip Steak at LT South Beach restaurant is the best in Miami! 3. Lounge at the rooftop pool.

Nobu Hotel Miami Beach

A Zen feeling with lively interludes pulls chic travelers to Nobu and its Japanese/Miami fusion luxury. Spacious suites offer floor-to-ceiling windows and panoramic Atlantic Ocean views. The Esencia Wellness Spa pampers; the Fitness Center invigorates.

Chef Nobu Matsuhisa's famous Japanese cuisine is served at his signature restaurant. With four oceanfront pools for cool dips and the warm Mid-Miami Beach shoreline for sunbathing you'll feel the glow.

Suggestions: 1. Weddings at the hotel are stellar. 2. The Ocean Social seaside restaurant serves tasty Life's a Peach cocktails and Shrimp Tacos. 3. The lobby bar is glamorous.

Hotel for young and adventurous

Hotel Continental Miami Beach, Tapestry Collection by Hilton

In ways this sprightly hotel, with its mid-century architecture and sunny bold-color interiors, is similar to the balmy beach town ones in Ipanema, Brazil. Pull up a chair at the Piola Famosa Per La Pizza outdoor/indoor restaurant and watch throngs of beachgoers walk by on bustling Collins Avenue.

Guests like the friendly, informal atmosphere and that nearby Mid-Miami Beach is quieter than South Beach. If hotels have a disposition, the Continental's is "sunny."

Suggestions: 1. The Divebar bar/restaurant's self-pour beverage wall. 2. Divebar's happy hour includes yummy smoked bacon deviled eggs. 3. Take a photo by the campy 1948 Continental pool sign.

For the mature and sophisticated

Classy acts like Alvin Ailey and Kamala Harris's book tour come to the Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts of Miami-Dade County.

The Phillip and Patricia Frost Museum of Science features an eye-catching 31-foot oculus lens at the bottom of the Gulf Stream Aquarium. Works by artists like Woody De Othello (Haitian American ceramicist) are exhibited at Pérez Art Museum Miami.

Walk down South Beach's Lincoln Road, a pedestrian mall, and stop at Havana 1957 for their Mojito Bar (120-plus rum types), view art installations like "Mr. Pink Takes Flight" and shop at stores as famous as Nike.

For the young and adventurous

Jet across the Atlantic Ocean aboard Thriller Miami Speedboat Adventures. Kids feed giraffes at Zoo Miami. Gaze at the animal print dresses on the dancers at R House Wynwood's famous Drag Brunch and party with a mixed crowd who love the sweet French toast and ogle the funny performers.

Play tennis with teaching pro Julio Avilla at South Beach's Flamingo Park Tennis Center or Jorge at North Beach's Miami Beach Tennis Center, which also has pickleball courts.

Visit food and travel writer Dwight Brown at [DwightBrownInk.com](http://DwightBrownInk.com).

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## Vaccine court lawyer now advises overhaul

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Bostic feels that Downing steered them away from it and toward a lawsuit against the manufacturer. The VICP ultimately dismissed her case.

Bostic was furious that the court paid Downing anything.

"Y'all could've gave that to me for my son," she said. "How dare y'all."

### In business with Washington

In June, Kennedy's HHS also awarded Downing's law firm, Brueckner Spitzer Shels, a sole-source federal contract to consult on an overhaul of the VICP. The contract has grown to \$410,000. Downing is the only attorney listed on the firm's website who has practiced in vaccine court.

Kennedy has routinely questioned vaccine safety and called the VICP "broken," saying it shields drug companies from some liability "no matter how negligent they are." As a personal injury lawyer, Kennedy previously spearheaded civil litigation against vaccine maker Merck.

Downing and about a dozen other lawyers have transferred hundreds of clients from the vaccine program to civil suits, where the financial rewards — for patients and their lawyers — could run far higher, according to a KFF Health News analysis of court records and program data. They've collected millions of taxpayer dollars in attorneys fees from vaccine court while launching precisely what it was designed to avoid: lawsuits against vaccine manufacturers.

This shift in legal strategy has fueled Kennedy's crusade against Merck, and it could end up hurting some vaccine-injured clients, several experts said.

University of California Law-San Francisco professor Dorit Reiss has studied vaccine court for over a decade and has tracked the rise of anti-vaccine forces in American politics. She said VICP attorneys who are also suing vaccine makers have "incentives to direct more people" to lawsuits, "when it might not be in their best interest."

### A delicate balance

Kennedy has criticized the VICP as a barrier to accountability. But for Bostic, vaccine court offered an opportunity to hold the government to its promise of caring for casualties of widespread immunization.

Like any medication, vaccines can have side effects. Serious reactions to

routine shots are rare, but for the unlucky few who bear this burden, the government promises recourse through its administrative program.

Vaccine court aims to strike a balance between protecting public health and helping individuals who may pay its price. The no-fault program allows claimants with vaccine-related injuries to get help without showing that the vaccine maker did anything wrong, even when the evidence doesn't meet courtroom standards.

The program has made more than 12,500 awards, totaling roughly \$5 billion in compensation. Historically, nearly half of claims have been resolved with some kind of award.

If patients aren't satisfied with the outcome or don't get a ruling within 240 days, they may leave the administrative program and sue the vaccine maker in civil court. Plaintiffs could potentially win larger awards. Lawyers could obtain higher fees, which they can't in vaccine court.

But winning a civil suit is far more difficult, in part because plaintiffs have a greater burden of showing the vaccine caused their injury and that the maker was at fault. Since the VICP was created, no vaccine injury lawsuit has won a judgment in regular court, records show.

That hasn't stopped some lawyers from trying. After the requisite 240 days, they have transferred hundreds of VICP claims into civil litigation against HPV vaccine manufacturer Merck, the KFF Health News analysis found.

The lawyers who represented those claims include Downing and other VICP attorneys with ties to Kennedy, court records show. Those include Kennedy advisers and people who work in the law office of his longtime personal lawyer Aaron Siri or with Children's Health Defense, the anti-vaccine outfit Kennedy founded, as well as a former Kennedy co-counsel in suits against Merck over its HPV vaccine, Gardasil.

Downing, whose law firm biography describes him as "one of the preeminent litigation attorneys in the Court of Federal Claims," has not won an HPV vaccine injury claim in the past five years, records show. Vaccine court did compensate dozens of HPV vaccine claims in that time, but most — including nearly all of Downing's — were withdrawn upon reaching the opt-out period.

## Medical school cost cuts access

Continued from page 2B

interest private loans to cover the gap.

Numbers like these appear to be limiting who can become a doctor, what specialty they choose and where they might practice. That, in turn, has troubling implications for the quality of care that low-income patients, patients of color and rural patients receive — if they receive care at all.

Medical school enrollment hit an all-time high last year, with more than 100,000 students. But a growing share of applicants and students come from families earning \$200,000 a year or more, while a declining share come from families earning less than \$75,000, according to a 2023 study. Applicants from the lowest-income families were half as likely to be accepted to medical school as those from the most affluent ones.

Meanwhile, in 2024-25, the first academic year after the Supreme Court banned schools from considering race in admissions, medical schools enrolled significantly fewer Black, Latino and Native American students.

These groups are already underrepresented in the medical profession. Eroding diversity further is bad news for communities that need medical care most.

Decades of research have shown that Black and Latino doctors, and physicians who are the first generation in their families to graduate from college, are more likely to become primary care physicians and serve low-income patients, immigrants and rural communities. These communities already struggle with a higher risk of illness and death, and a shortage of health care providers.

People tend to seek more

preventive care, trust their doctor more, and follow through on treatment more consistently when the doctor shares their racial or ethnic background. One study even found that having more Black primary care providers in a county was associated with longer life expectancy and lower death rates among Black patients.

On average, doctors in front-line medicine — pediatrics, public health, or family medicine, for example — earn less than half as much as those in top-paying specialties like orthopedic surgery and radiology. The U.S. has a shortage of doctors in many specialties but it's hardly surprising that the gap is greatest for primary care.

Berlyand and Nakhate say that when they were considering applying to medical school more than a decade ago, mentors and veteran physicians urged them not to worry about the cost. Now such advice strikes them as hollow.

Monthly loan payments begin when medical school ends, though graduates spend years afterward earning modest salaries in residency programs and fellowships.

Berlyand took out three loans to pay for Harvard Medical School. Each had different interest rates, payment structures, and monthly due dates.

Most of the money came from a federal loan with a complex plan in which monthly payments increase as income does. These plans are popular among medical students because payments remain low during residency. But those low payments don't fully cover interest, so it piles up and increases the balance even as the borrower makes every loan payment.

That's why Berlyand has more debt today than when he graduated. His payments now run around \$3,000 a month.

Like many physicians, he has been counting on the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program to relieve his debt burden after he makes payments for 10 years. The program erases debt for people who have qualified student loans and are employed by the government or a not-for-profit or tax-exempt institution such as a hospital.

Now he sees some politicians pushing to cut back or eliminate the forgiveness program. That worries him. So do the changes the Trump administration is making to federal student loan programs, which restructure and consolidate payment plans, with harsher terms for borrowers with high incomes and a lot of debt.

Berlyand and Nakhate say health care leaders must take action on costs. More medical schools might follow the lead of the few that now waive tuition for most or all medical students.

The Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, for example, covers tuition for medical students whose families earn less than \$300,000 and also covers living expenses and fees for families earning less than \$175,000. The NYU Grossman School of Medicine covers tuition for everyone admitted to its M.D. program.

Berlyand and Nakhate also would like to see simpler, more affordable loan programs and initiatives to streamline medical education and training without sacrificing rigor. For example, universities could find ways to combine undergraduate and medical degree programs.

### « SPONSORED CONTENT »



STOCK PHOTO

For solopreneurs running their own business on their own, there are tips for maximum growth.

## Tips for Charlotte 'solopreneurs' to grow their own businesses

Sponsored by JPMORGANCHASE

You've put in the late nights, the weekends and the hustle. And now, what started as an opportunity to make extra money has turned into an enterprise with real potential.

If you handle everything on your own — logistics, production, marketing, finances and everything in between — you're part of a growing group of entrepreneurs nicknamed "solopreneurs." While the image of a small business often includes an owner and a few employees, for many entrepreneurs, "solopreneurship" makes the most sense for their business model and goals.

If you're considering the solopreneur life or have already launched your business, Justin Hurst, a JPMorgan Chase Senior Business Consultant in Charlotte, offers five helpful tips for you to grow your business in 2026.

### 1) Identify or solidify a business opportunity.

If you want to become a solopreneur or enhance your current offerings, look for a need in Charlotte or come up with an innovative idea. Maybe it's a service that can help others or a product that could enhance or simplify their lives.

Once you have your big idea, careful planning and preparation can give your startup its best shot at becoming a success. That can include researching your industry's trends to see if you're meeting a niche or a growing need. Look for long-term demand and understand your total addressable market, not just seasonal or trendy success.

### 2) Make a business plan.

Start by writing or refining a business description to outline your goals and strategy. Your plan doesn't have to be long, but it should outline your mission, goals, competitive analysis, marketing approach and financial forecasts.

If you're already running a business, examine your customer base. Do you have repeat customers? Are they referring others to you? Side hustles that work have a steady and growing customer base. If yours does, it's a positive sign your business may be ready for the next step.

### 3) Maximize savings to impact growth.

Many entrepreneurs use some personal savings to get their businesses started but also pursue business lines of credit or small business loans to

fund equipment and marketing plans. No matter how you get started, prioritizing saving along the way will help secure the funds you need to get your business up and running. One powerful tool for solo entrepreneurs is the new Solo 401(k) from JPMorgan Chase. This plan is designed for business owners without full-time employees, apart from their spouse, and allows for high annual contributions — up to \$72,000 for themselves and their spouse — with both pre-tax and Roth options.

The key is consistency. According to data from Chase, while Solo 401(k) accounts are a popular choice for self-employed business owners, 70% didn't contribute in the past year. Building small, sustainable habits — such as setting up automatic monthly contributions or scheduling quarterly check-ins with a financial advisor — can strengthen follow-through. Over time, these simple actions add up, helping ensure Solo 401(k) accounts reach their full potential and deliver meaningful long-term results.

You could also look for additional financing from angel investors — wealthy individuals that can provide small investments, usually in the very early stages of a business. Angel investors accept more risk but want an ownership stake. Crowdfunding can also be beneficial for solo entrepreneurs. With the right product and approach, you can raise small dollar amounts from a large pool of individual online backers with the bonus of connecting with your target audience early on.

4) Develop your marketing and brand strategy.

Define your brand voice and value proposition and choose the right marketing channels for growth. You might explore channels such as social media, email marketing or paid advertising. As you set a realistic marketing budget, consider the cost of tools, advertising and outsourced services like graphic design or content writing. Start small, measure results and scale what works.

You should also build a strong network to find mentors who can provide startup advice. Stay focused on your target audience so you can market to them effectively.

### 5) Plan for growth and operations.

The logistical side of en-

trepreneurship includes thinking about order fulfillment, customer service, project management and scheduling. Invest in the right tools to streamline daily operations, improve customer experience and save time.

A final note: Self-employment comes with new tax responsibilities, including quarterly estimated taxes and self-employment tax. You may also need to collect and remit sales tax, depending on your industry — and you could have to pay sales tax in all the states where your goods or services are sold.

You may already be operating as a sole proprietor, but going full time could mean exploring a more formal business structure. While creating an LLC for your side hustle is common, consider which structure best supports your long-term goals and legal needs. Depending on your industry, you may need licenses, permits, insurance, contracts or compliance paperwork before you can legally or safely scale operations.

If you want more assistance in taking your solo business to the next level, your local financial institution has resources that can help. You can also reach out to a Chase business banker today for more information and advice.

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JOIN THE CHARLOTTE POST IN FEBRUARY FOR

## Legends & Legacy

Join The Charlotte Post for a Black History Month celebration of Charlotteans who have impacted the community through their groundbreaking achievements, innovation and perseverance.

**FEB 10**

Law Enforcement Pioneer  
Rodney Monroe  
6-7 p.m.  
SUGAR CREEK LIBRARY  
4045 N. Tryon St. Unit A

Register to attend in person or virtually: <https://thecharlottepost.com/BHMLandL>



## Queen City celebrates the blues

By Herbert L. White

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The latest events from stage, screen and exhibits in Charlotte:

Feb. 6-8

*Afro Legacy Fest*, a celebration Afro-descendant heritage through music, dance, art, and culture. The event will take place at VAPA Center, Harvey B. Gantt Center, Historic Rosedale, and Viva Collective.

Feb. 6, VAPA Center, 700 N Tryon St., 6-10 p.m. (Free)

Opening celebration with live cultural and musical performances.

Feb. 7, Harvey B. Gantt Center, 12-5 p.m. (Free)

Interactive workshops, cultural exhibitions, and artistic presentations for the whole family.

Feb. 8, Historic Rosedale 11 a.m.-2 p.m., 3427 N Tryon St. (Free)

Honor the ancestors, participate in a community conversation, and share a potluck. Bring food or drinks to share (fruits or other simple items are welcome).

Viva Collective, 901 N Tryon St., Suite B

4:30-6 p.m.: Bomba drum workshop (\$30). Several instruments will be available; if you have your own drum, bring it.

6:15-8 p.m.: Bomba dance master class with Rafa Cepeda (\$45; long skirt recommended).

On the Net:  
[lacasadelacultura.net/afro-legacy-fest](http://lacasadelacultura.net/afro-legacy-fest)

Feb. 6-22

*"Primary Trust,"* The Arts Factory, 1545 W Trade St.

Written by Eboni Booth and directed by Tiffany Bryant-Jackson, "Primary Trust" won the 2024 Pulitzer Prize for Drama and Outer Critics Circle Outstanding New Off-Broadway play. The cast includes Miles Thompson (Kenneth), Marvin King (Bart), Tim Huffman (Clay/Sam) and Frandasia Williams (Corrina/Wally's waiter) making her Three Bone Theatre debut.

Thursday-Saturday shows start at 8 p.m.; Sundays at 2 p.m.

Tickets: [threebonetheatre.com](http://threebonetheatre.com)

Feb. 13

*Chaka Khan, Patti LaBelle, Gladys Knight, and Stephanie Mills* are extending their "The Queens! 4 Legends. 1 Stage" tour to Spectrum Center. The tour brings together four trailblazing R&B/pop giants for a celebration of legacy, sisterhood, and music.

Tickets: [bpktickets.com](http://bpktickets.com).

Feb. 13-14

*Charlotte Symphony* presents Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 5, Belk Theater, 130 N. Tryon St.

As part of the CSO Spotlight Series, pianist and vocalist Gabriel Kahane joins the orchestra conducted by Kwame Ryan to perform "Pattern of the Rail," a song cycle inspired by Kahane's cross-country train journey through the United States during the 2016 presidential election.

Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 5 closes the program, tracing a journey from darkness to resolve, with sweeping melodies and dramatic power.

Program starts at 7:30 p.m. both days. Tickets \$40.39-\$145.68; available at [tx.blumenthalarts.org](http://tx.blumenthalarts.org).

March 7

The eighth annual *Queen City Blues Festival* is at Ovens Auditorium at 7 p.m. The Southern soul and modern blues scene blend old-school storytelling with contemporary R&B, with performances by King George, Pokey Bear, Lenny Williams, West Love, Tono Armani, Mike Clark Jr., E.J. Jones, Stephanie Luckett & the YP Band, and Henry Welch.

Tickets available at [ticketmaster.com](http://ticketmaster.com).

March 12

Leela James plays the Carolina Theatre at 8 p.m. as part of the 2B Honest Tour.

James, who has released seven LP albums, channels some of the all-time R&B/soul greats with performances that are equal parts church and blues club. James has eight top-20 R&B radio singles, including two No. 1 tracks on the Billboard charts. Her 2021 single Complicated topped the Billboard Adult R&B songs chart for three straight weeks.

Tickets are \$68-\$122 and online at [Ticketmaster.com](http://Ticketmaster.com).

April 7

Contemporary soul trio Moonchild plays Knight Theater at 7:30 p.m. as part of the Waves Tour.

The Los Angeles-based threesome of Amber Navrarr, Andris Mattson and Max Bryk combines neo-soul, jazz and electronic music into a genre-fluid sound.

Tickets start at \$52.77. [blumenthalarts.org/events/detail/moonchild-waves-tour](http://blumenthalarts.org/events/detail/moonchild-waves-tour)



ARTS EMPOWERMENT PROJECT

The Arts Empowerment Project gives children from underrepresented communities opportunities to explore the arts in a supportive environment.

## Initiative opens creativity and opportunities for kids

*Arts Empowerment Project empowers children with career options*

By Nikya Hightower

FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

Art is necessary.

The Arts Empowerment Project is pouring into Charlotte's creative community. The nonprofit uses art as a form of healing for children dealing with violence and trauma through programs focused on equity, opportunity and access. They learn lifelong skills and goal setting in a supportive environment.

"Helping kids who are underserved become whoever they want to be, and they are not restricted to the circumstances to which they may have been born," founder Natalie Allen said. "Empowering them using arts as a vehicle to seek out new opportunities in their community that they have not been exposed to, to really work on their social and emotional learning and feeling as though they have self-efficacy and can take on things and handle ups and downs with resilience."

The arts, Allen said, is a force to improving access and learning for

children's development, but often lacks funding and support needed.

"Some people don't always see it that way, but art is a powerful universal language that can inspire people beyond measure," she said.

The Arts Empowerment Project provides multiple creative options from culinary to acting, which gives kids freedom to learn what they enjoy without feeling stuck.

"We give kids choices, which sometimes they don't always have," Allen said. "That's another opportunity for them to choose what they're interested in. And it's funny, because a lot of times kids will say they're interested in one thing, but that they get exposed to something else."

Allen points out that a part of working with underserved children is taking the time to invest in them. Having someone who is not only welcoming but supportive can make a difference in turning a passion

into a career.

"So many times kids in communities are sidelined, they're bullied, they're pushed aside," she said. "And how can you draw out of kids their own self-confidence, their own power, and let them see how wonderful they really are."

As a regional creative hub, Charlotte has a lot to offer anyone looking to step into the creative field. For underserved students lacking exposure, the nonprofit also opens doors to possibilities. The project's goal is to give them more than a new skill as well as a different perspective on life.

"Some kids that we've served they've never been in uptown," Allen said. "They were from Charlotte, they live in Charlotte, but they have no access to the Blumenthal, they don't know where to park, they don't know about the Gant Center, they don't know about the Mint Museum. ... I really hope that they feel that they have the opportunity to thrive and to be their best selves and not just survive."

## Theatre Gap salutes Broadway powerhouse

By Herbert L. White

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One of Broadway's brightest lights has earned an award from a Charlotte nonprofit.

**LaChanze** is the second recipient of Charlotte-based Theatre Gap Initiative's second Trailblazer Award for her impact on American theatre as a performer and producer. LaChanze will be celebrated at TGI Mixtape, Volume IV: Stay Gold on March 7 at the Parr Center on the main campus of Central Piedmont Community College.

A Tony Award-winning actress, La-

Chanze has a best actress in a musical prize for her portrayal of Celie in "The Color Purple" and has performed in "Once on This Island," "Company," "Ragtime," and "Summer: The Donna Summer Musical."

The Trailblazer Award honors artists whose careers exemplify courage, excellence, and a commitment to opening doors for others. Actress and activist Liliias White won the inaugural award.

LaChanze is also a producer and arts advocate. She was lead producer of the Broadway revival of "Trouble in Mind," which earned Tony Award nominations for highlighting issues of race, power, and equity in the theatre industry. As a producer, LaChanze has lobbied for ex-

panded access, amplification of underrepresented voices, and challenging the field expand inclusivity.

Some of her other projects include "Kimberly Akimbo," "Buena Vista Social Club," "The Outsiders," "Topdog/Underdog," Brandon Jacob's "Purpose," and "Cats: The Jellicle Ball."

TGI Mixtape, a combination of music, storytelling and stage celebration, is Theatre Gap Initiative's major fundraiser. The nonprofit founded by theatre educator and Tony winner Corey Mitchell aims to improve access to career opportunities in the arts by training and mentoring young creatives from moderate- and low-income backgrounds.

## South End home for Levine Museum of the New South

By Herbert L. White

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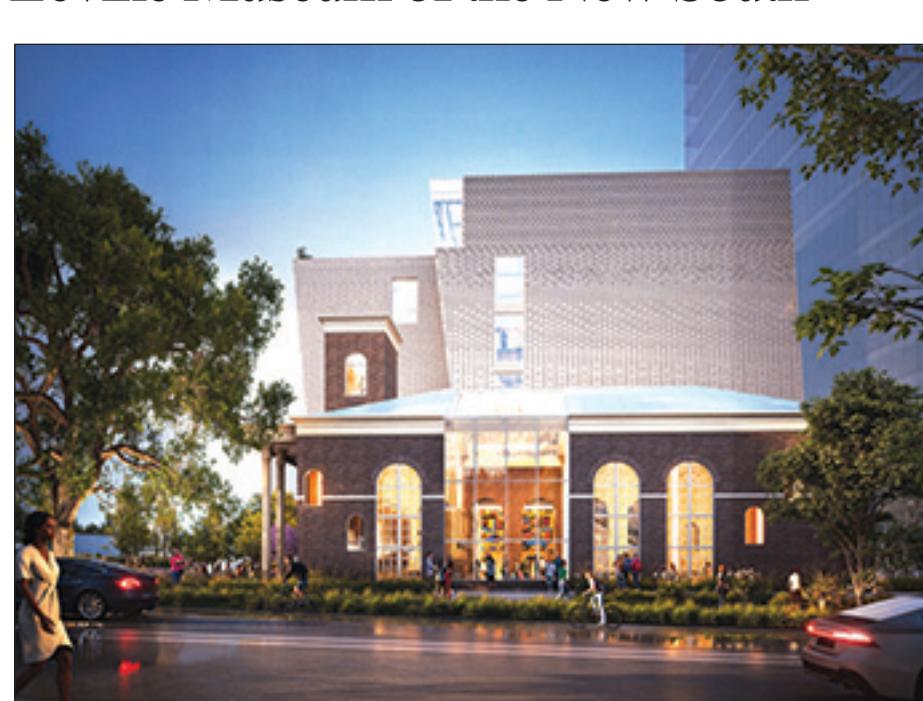
Levine Museum of the New South is moving to a new home in South End.

The museum closed on a deal with Grave Covenant Church to buy its .57-acre property at 1800 South Blvd., adding a major cultural anchor in the neighborhood. The site includes two buildings totaling about 10,000 square feet. Pickard Chilton is the design architect.

"This new campus represents a bold step forward for the Museum and for Charlotte," museum President and CEO Richard Cooper said in a statement. "It will be more than a museum—it will be a gathering space where history sparks conversation and where diverse perspectives come together to explore what the New South has been and what it is becoming."

The museum, which was founded in 1990, moved out of its first physical location on Seventh Street in 2022. Since then, it's hosted programs and exhibits at locations across the city. Since its launch, the museum has reached more than 1.7 million people through exhibitions, digital storytelling, and civic programs.

"Levine Museum of the New South has played a vital role in helping Charlotte understand itself and its place in the broader story of the region," said Sara Fedyna, senior program officer of The Community Fund at Leon Levine Foundation. "The new home in South End allows the museum to deepen its

PICKARD CHILTON  
An artist's concept of the East Boulevard view of the Levine Museum of the New South's new campus in South End.

impact and continue serving as a space for learning, dialogue, and connection for generations to come."

The museum will continue in-person and digital programming as well as community engagement initiatives while the new campus takes shape. Details of construction timeframe and the campus' debut weren't disclosed.

"Levine Museum of the New South uses history as a way to connect people and spark understanding," said Glen Wright, chair of the museum's board of directors. "This next chapter deepens that commitment by helping communities see themselves in the story of the South and inspiring participation toward a more inclusive future."



# Know it by heart.

This Black History Month, we honor the many ways legacy is shared and preserved, from cherished recipes and timeless wisdom to the moments that become unforgettable memories.

"Tradition was passed down by being included in the cooking process, from a young age until a young adult. I am writing down the recipes in a cookbook to share with my children as they get older."

- Christina S., Georgia

"Food is our history on a plate. It's the creativity, resilience, and love that carried us through generations."

- S. Daley, Florida

"My grandmother cooked with lots of love. Her food brought the family together—nourished the soul. Watching her prepare and cook was almost magical to me as a kid."

- M. Moses, Georgia

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